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## THE REFORM OF COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS IN LATIN.

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CHARLES KNAPP  
Barnard College, Columbia University

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The purpose of this paper is, first, to consider certain criticisms of the requirements in Latin for admission to our various colleges, secondly, to examine the remedy proposed in certain quarters as a means of curing the alleged defects in those requirements, and, lastly, to urge a revision of the mode of administering entrance examinations in Latin which, it is believed, will fully meet all criticisms of the prevailing requirements and at the same time make for far better progress in Latin, in school and college alike, than is achieved under existing conditions.

American colleges differ widely in the amount of reading in Latin which they demand of candidates for admission, but in their modes of administering the examinations for entrance and in their ways of seeking to measure the fitness of candidates they are essentially at one. The candidates are examined mainly on prepared work, that is, on portions of Latin literature which they are expected to have read and studied with care, with any assistance they may be able to obtain from their teachers or from editions of the prescribed works. They are required to translate into English passages from these parts of Latin literature and to show some knowledge of the mechanics of the passages, that is, of Latin syntax. There is a tendency to expect the students to display some conception of the contents of the works in question, and of their literary divisions, and of the varied literary questions which they suggest. There is commonly also an examination in the translation into English of Latin prose or verse, or both, at sight, and in the translation of English, whether in the form of detached sentences or connected narrative, into Latin.

With the situation as here outlined dissatisfaction is vigorously expressed in divers quarters. The complainants fall into

two groups, the representatives of the schools and the teaching staff of the colleges. The schoolmen complain that too much is required, that in the time at their disposal and in the crowded state of the school curriculum they cannot get their students satisfactorily over the ground prescribed. Coupled with these complaints is a claim that if the *quantity* required for admission were to be reduced, the *quality* of the work done would be greatly improved. From the point of view of the college instructor the average freshman is grotesquely deficient in his Latin; his knowledge of inflectional forms is uncertain, his conceptions of syntax are futile, his vocabulary is a negligible quantity, he has no particular power to read Latin, with or without dictionary and grammar. Both sets of complainants unite in deploring the use of translations ("ponies") by students, male and female both.

The view that the present requirements for admission to college are in general excessive is presented most earnestly, perhaps, by Mr. Wilson Farrand, of the Newark Academy; see the *School Review* for January last (Vol. XVI, pp. 12-41). I shall quote only what he has to say of Latin (p. 20) :

My fourth recommendation is that Latin and Greek composition shall be either eliminated or decidedly reduced. Composition is of unquestioned value in the mastery of a language, and I do not see how anyone can teach elementary Latin or Greek without its constant use, but when it comes to training, or trying to train, our pupils to write Latin like Cicero, or Greek in the style of Xenophon, my observation is that the results do not pay for the labor. I am aware that to many of you this view will appear heretical, and I do not propose at this time to argue it. I merely assert, as a thesis for discussion, that Latin and Greek composition in college-entrance requirements, should be limited to exercises designed to illustrate commonly used grammatical principles.

In this brief paragraph, Mr. Farrand seems to speak of composition as a highly valuable thing and yet to oppose it entirely or largely. I suspect that the confusion is a matter of definition of terms and that, consciously or unconsciously, he is taking advantage of the time-honored blunder of the colleges in using the word "composition" at all in connection either with entrance examinations or their undergraduate courses in the writing of

Latin. No college of which I have knowledge has required candidates really to *compose* in Latin. Mr. Farrand admits that no one can teach elementary Latin without the constant use of composition, by which I take him to mean constant practice in turning into Latin English sentences written by someone else and printed for him in a composition book. This is manifestly a far different and less difficult process than the one involved in true composition. If, as Mr. Farrand admits, this sort of work is essential to the teaching of elementary Latin, why take exception to the conduct of the colleges when they seek to discover, by entrance-examination tests, whether a given candidate has done this indispensable work?

In another respect Mr. Farrand himself destroys the edifice he has so laboriously constructed. In the third paragraph of his address, before he had really entered upon the statement of his position, he said (p. 12) :

I am not just now concerned with the physical strain upon our students. It exists, more strongly with our girls than with our boys, and it is a factor not to be ignored in the problem, but personally I believe that the physical strain is due more to improper social life and home conditions, and to school organizations and athletics, than to over-study. My contention is that the amount of work we can secure from our boys and girls is spread over too large an area to secure the best results. We need less diffusion and more concentration.

It is surely extraordinary that one should argue seriously that colleges should adapt their entrance requirements, that is, their standards, to the amount of work the schools can secure from their pupils, from pupils engaged in purely extraneous non-scholastic matters. We do indeed need less diffusion and more concentration, but the concentration needed is concentration upon study!

Of our two sets of complainants one, surely, is on a priori grounds entitled to far less consideration than the other. The schoolman by his very position is virtually incapacitated to see the problem aright. By that I mean that it is impossible for him to take a detached and impersonal view. His task is to prepare boys and girls for college; there is nothing final about his work, it is to be tested by a different tribunal. The schoolmaster fears

that his school will be judged by the mental performances of the pupils he sends up to college; he sees a close financial relation between those performances and himself. Naturally, therefore, he casts about at all times for some explanation of the failure or seeming failure of his pupils, some explanation, that is, that shall leave his own position impregnable. He not unnaturally wants less to do, he not unnaturally desires absolute uniformity of entrance requirements the country over; these things will enable him to conduct his school on the most economical basis possible, with the smallest number of teachers. He shuts his eyes therefore and asks the world to shut its eyes to the ceaseless distractions of school life, with the diminishing total of hours devoted by pupils to serious study, and throws all the blame on the standards set up by the college; in a word, asks the colleges to lower their standards because he cannot discipline his pupils.

I confess to the heartiest approval of the trenchant words of Mrs. George Haven Putnam (formerly well known, as Miss Emily James Smith, as the dean of Barnard College), as published in *Putnam's Magazine* for January last, in an article entitled "A Classical Education":

The universities and colleges exist for the purpose of determining, on scientific and not on commercial grounds, the best way to train our youth, and then to impose their views on the community. The very reason they are endowed by the public is to enable them to act disinterestedly. Upborne by the consciousness of the great interests of which they are trustees, of the tremendous part they are doomed to play in democracy, they might without arrogance use toward a young man at least as dictatorial a tone as he expects to hear from his tailor.

I come now to the plea already mentioned that if the quantity of the entrance requirements is reduced, the quality of the work done in the schools will be improved. So far as the classics are concerned the experiment has already been tried, and with results wholly disastrous. As a matter of fact, taking the country as a whole, the quantity of Latin required for admission to college is less today than it was twenty years ago. Thirty years ago candidates in Latin were required to present Greek as well; they were required to know something of ancient history and ancient geography and to pass a respectable examination in scansion.

Ancient history and geography were presently divorced from the classics (where they properly belong), and less and less stress was laid on scansion. Ancient history does, indeed, figure today in the subjects for admission to college, but as a thing divorced from the classics, as an optional subject. The instant result of this diminution of the requirement in classics was the disregard of Greek; it was no longer compulsory, it was no longer artificially stimulated, and so it was no longer taken save by the few. The Latin work itself has not profited in the meantime, though if there were any value to the plea made, for example, by Mr. Farrand, we ought to have witnessed a marked improvement in the quality of the work done on what remained of the Latin requirements. The only result has been that classical students do not get ancient history or ancient geography as part of their classical work at all, and that the student in the freshman class who has any adequate drill in scansion, that is to say, who has been made to feel that the form of immortal poetry is a vital part of that poetry, and is a thing worth serious study, is a *rara avis*. The schools know that the candidates will not be examined in such matters, or that, if the examination paper does contain these matters, the college instructor, realizing how weak the schools are in this regard, will attach virtually no importance to these questions. Unless all experience counts for naught, the reduction of the entrance requirements in Latin, the elimination of any subjects from the present list, will result merely in the failure on the part of the schools to regard those subjects at all, without corresponding increase in the effectiveness of instruction in what remains. A reduced curriculum in Latin will offer tempting opportunities for a reduction of expenses by a reduction of the teaching staff; history will repeat itself, in that the subjects lopped off will not be considered at all, and the rest will be no more effectively handled, so long at least as schoolmasters continue to talk of what they can do "with the amount of work we can secure from our students."

Having expressed myself on the futility of the proposed panacea for the weaknesses which confessedly exist at present, I pass to consider another, and, as it seems to me, a far more

promising way of remedying those defects. This way lies along the line of improving the instruction in Latin in the schools, and of changing the mode of administering entrance requirements and of conducting entrance examinations.

There is one curious incongruity in the present entrance examinations. As everyone knows, the student is tested partly on translation from Latin into English, partly on translation from English into Latin. There is, I take it, no question which is the more difficult of these two tasks. When the candidate essays to translate from Latin into English, he has a definite text before him, created not by himself but by a master of Latin; he is invited merely to analyze what is set before him. In a word his work is wholly or mainly of the nature of science or scientific analysis. In writing English into Latin he is attempting synthesis; his work partakes at once of the nature of science and of the nature of art. To write into Latin, at demand, any set of ideas the examiner may set before him—ideas often remote from the pupil's daily experience, limited in scope as that range of ideas is as actually set in examinations to the thoughts with which the pupil has had some chance to become acquainted in his Latin reading—is a far harder task than that of learning to express in daily conversation, in a foreign language in constant use, the limited range of ideas of one's own ordinary experience.

Yet, though the task of writing English into Latin is so much more difficult than that of translating Caesar or Cicero or Vergil into English, strange to say the colleges require candidates for admission to perform the harder task absolutely at sight; on the other hand the translation from Latin to English is almost wholly in prepared work.

The colleges play against their own best interests by thus confining so largely their translation of Latin to the passages previously studied; it is this that has given to the "pony" its vogue. In the young student the memory is stronger than any other faculty; the task of memorizing the "pony," at least in the harder passages, is not too great for many students. That demand on the mind can be met far more readily than the call

for powers of reflection, of logical analysis, of solid grasp of forms and syntax, of apprehension of word-order.

It may be said that practically all colleges require translation of Latin at sight. True, but in such fashion that the requirement is of little value. The sight paper at present plays but a small rôle in the total of the examinations. Again, the instructor is at great disadvantage in selecting a passage to be set at sight and in estimating the merit of the student's work thereon. I mean this: the college instructor has not had, until recently, any definite, objective standard by which he can measure precisely the vocabulary a candidate ought to have at the time he presents himself for admission to college. Unless he knows that, he cannot set an absolutely fair paper in sight translation nor can he accurately and fairly value the papers afterward. Since he has not known exactly what to demand of a student in such an examination, he has made allowances in his marking of the paper which have in large measure robbed the examination of severity or value.

Further, the present examinations and the methods of instruction in the schools which they encourage or impose do not yield the results desired. Students as a rule display no power to read Latin. It will be agreed that a highly desirable result of the teaching of Latin would be the development in the student of the ability to read Latin of reasonable difficulty at sight, or with little need of appeal to dictionary and grammar. Whether all would agree that from the beginning this should be the end of the teaching of Latin, all will agree that any method which will produce this result, which will develop the power to read Latin, will solve forthwith the problem of the school and the college.

Such a method is, I think, at hand.

What does a pupil need to enable him to read Latin with ease? Everyone will reply, knowledge of inflections, mastery of syntax, control of vocabulary, apprehension of word-order (I am supposing that the pupil has at least a modicum of linguistic sense, or, if you will, of common sense). Substantial progress has been made in the task of helping the pupil to a



mastery of forms and syntax. Any method which will increase the amount of Latin read by the pupil will add to his understanding of syntax and to his apprehension of word-order. Until recently, however, no adequate study in the vocabulary of the preparatory or high-school Latin (as it may be conveniently, though somewhat oddly called) has been made. Caesar's vocabulary had, indeed, to some extent been studied; it has long been known which words were of commonest occurrence in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, and due account of those words has been taken in various Beginners' Latin Books which proudly advertise that all or nearly all the words used in them are words of common occurrence in Caesar. Thus the intelligent and diligent student was fairly well furnished with vocabulary at the time he essayed connected reading in Caesar. But the effort to give systematic aid to the student in his attempts to acquire a vocabulary stopped with Caesar until Professor Lodge, of Teachers College, set himself to the task some four years ago. The solution has recently appeared in the form of a *Vocabulary of High School Latin*, prepared by Professor Lodge, and published by Teachers College as No. 9 in its "Series of Contributions to Education." In this book Professor Lodge sets forth the complete vocabulary of Caesar's *Gallic War*, I-V, the Catilinarian Orations, the oration on the Manilian Law, and that for Archias, and of the *Aeneid*, I-VI. The words are arranged, of course, in alphabetical order. By differentiation of types 2,000 words are picked out of the total vocabulary as words of such value to the student, not only in his school work but in all Latin reading in college or in later life, that they ought to be the student's permanent possession by the time of his application for admission to college. By typographical devices, again, these 2,000 words are divided into three classes, so that 1,000 words are marked out to be learned by the end of the Caesar year (the second year of the high-school course), and 500 more in each of the last two years. Now for the first time it is possible for everyone to know exactly the relation of the vocabulary of the *De Bello Gallico* to that of the orations commonly read in schools and to that of the *Aeneid*, I-VI. Nay, more, it is easy to demonstrate by what one may, if

he will, call laboratory experiments the relation of the preparatory school vocabulary to the vocabulary of the authors to be read later. Such experimentation Professor Lodge has already made, as part of his singularly exhaustive study of the problem to which he set himself. In his preface he writes:

The number of words occurring five times or more (in preparatory Latin) is surprisingly small. Furthermore, these words are the essential words of the Latin language; for examination of a relatively equal amount of material selected from Caesar's *Civil War*, Cicero's *Orations*, other than those read in schools, and Ovid, showed occurrences of more than nine-tenths of these words. . . . A student who has at his command these 2,000 words will have the vocabulary of fully nine-tenths of all the ordinary Latin that he is likely to come in contact with. He will really have much more because the remaining tenth contains a large proportion of compounds of words already known.

The first part, then, of the proposed remedy for all the complaints made against the existing conditions in Latin study is the mastery of this special vocabulary of 2,000 words, not merely for purposes of translation from Latin into English, but for purposes of rendering English into Latin.

The second part of the remedy is a reformulation of the requirements for admission and a reform of the mode of conducting examinations. The requirements may be set forth as follows: a thorough and accurate knowledge of inflections and of the chief principles of syntax, a vocabulary of 2,000 Latin words and their English equivalents, the ability to scan the hexameter meter, and a careful study of some prescribed portion of Latin literature of not more than 1,500 lines in length. The intent of the examinations on these requirements might well be defined as the testing of the candidate's knowledge of Latin and his ability to use his knowledge. To that end the examinations should be made almost wholly sight examinations. Since the meanings of all words not included within the 2,000 can be given on the examination paper, the candidate may be expected to translate with substantial accuracy and into good English. No allowance whatever need be made for ignorance of word-meanings or for slovenly English.

The examination might well be divided as follows:

## A. Prose Composition.

1. Detached sentences, designed to test knowledge of forms and of the chief principles of syntax.
2. A short passage of easy narrative designed to test the candidate's ability to write Latin consecutively.

B. A passage of moderate difficulty from some Latin prose author to be translated at sight.

C. A passage of moderate difficulty from some Latin poet to be translated at sight.

D. A special examination upon some particular portion of Latin literature, previously studied, with reference to literary force and value; for example: Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, VII, or Cicero, *De Lege Manilia*, or Vergil, *Aeneid*, VI.

In the examinations under A, B, and C, the Latin equivalents for all English words not readily translatable by the aid of the selected vocabulary, and the English equivalents of all Latin words not in that list should be given. The advantages of this plan are readily apparent. They may be grouped under two heads, according as they concern the work of the schools, and the entrance examinations, and as they concern the work of the colleges, I take them in order, grouped on this principle.

1. It gives objectivity and definiteness everywhere to the work of the schools. The essential forms of inflections are self-evident; there is agreement about the main principles of syntax; now at last the mastery of vocabulary has been made entirely possible. The schoolmaster now knows exactly what words will be of most service to himself and to his pupils; he knows also in what order those most useful words should be taught. The work can be made at every point definite; the pupil's progress in the mastery of the select vocabulary can be tested with mathematical accuracy. It will also be possible, as never before, to test the student's capacity to use knowledge in Latin.

2. It will give elasticity to the work of the schools. It will no longer be necessary to read prescribed works in Latin; the teacher may read with his classes what he will. Complaints are made at present by teachers that they are compelled constantly to read the same books and that, in the case of such authors as

Caesar, they dare not go outside the prescribed first four or five books, though the work in Caesar might be made far more interesting if they were at liberty to make a selection from all seven books. If the proposed reform is adopted, this difficulty is banished at once. The problem of the schools will assume a correct form; they will seek to teach their pupils how to read Latin; they will no longer seek merely to carry them over a prescribed list of works and to cram them for examination on those works alone.

3. It meets the cry of the schools that the amount of reading prescribed in Latin as the condition precedent to admission in Latin is too great. What will be exacted henceforth—should this plan be adopted—will be capacity to read Latin. It will be left to each teacher to develop this capacity in his own way; if he can develop it without reading the traditional amount of Latin he will be at liberty to do so. It is probable, however, that under the proposed plan the amount of Latin read by students before they apply for admission will exceed that read now, for, since the work will be from the start definite, with a definite goal and a definite path marked out from the very beginning for the reaching of that goal, the student's work will move more rapidly and satisfactorily than at present, and pupil and teacher alike will be more interested in seeing how much they can read with pleasure and profit than in seeing how much they can do without.

4. The adoption of the plan by the College Entrance Examination Board or by a number of colleges will go far toward solving another problem that confronts the schools, referred to at the beginning of this paper. If all colleges made their Latin entrance examinations mainly examinations at sight, without prescription of particular works, the training for all students in the school would be exactly alike, regardless of the particular college at which the pupil was to enter. The identity of the books to be read in the school, and the amount to be read in them, would rest wholly with the school; the school's one problem would be to develop in all its Latin pupils the ability to read Latin.

5. It will give to the college examiner a sure test to apply to candidates for admission. When he selects his passage for translation from Latin into English at sight, he will be guided by the Select Vocabulary; he will set no passage whose vocabulary falls in large part outside the list of 2,000 words. He will understand clearly what the candidate ought to know. When he reads the paper he can determine its value with mathematical accuracy. He will be able to test capacity, power to read the language, ability to undertake with profit the work of the college.

6. The use of "ponies" will be discouraged. How serious this evil is at present everyone knows. If the proposed reform is adopted, it will do the student no good to get his daily work by the aid of a translation; it will be a foolish waste of time to commit to memory a translation of work on which he will not be examined. Indeed, the use of a translation will be the most serious handicap conceivable to his acquisition of the powers which the examination will be designed to test.

7. Everywhere the teaching of Latin will be uplifted, by the substitution of an aim eminently practical and sane, wholly definite, and entirely possible of achievement (unless the student lacks that linguistic sense which no method can supply) for the existing chaos. The plan, then, means much to the schools; it will mean much to the colleges. They will admit in Latin only those who have by a reasonable test displayed their capacity to handle the language; the progress of Latin classes within the college will be far more rapid than it is at present, and the higher rate of progress will be attended by far less friction than attends the snail-like progress of today. I need not point out the advantages that will come from the possibility of taking one's classes comfortably and surely over a larger body of Latin writings; our students will then be able in the course of a couple of years' study within the college, added to the work of the schools, really to get a conspectus of the major works of Latin, to furnish their minds with a store of things which the man of culture should possess.

This remedy, then, is offered for the candid and careful

consideration of all teachers of Latin throughout the country, in school and college alike. I shall say here that the plan outlined is not original with myself. It is a plan of my esteemed colleague and friend, Professor Lodge. I have talked the matter over with him many times in the last four years, and the present statement has his approval.